

Draft Syllabus: HIST-3822 Georgetown Connections

Summer 2025 – Draft 2.23.25

Course Dates: Five Weeks, June 2nd to July 3rd

Time: M-Th, 10:45 AM to 12:45 PM

Location: Intercultural Center, Room 104

Instructor:

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Office hours by appointment

Course Description

Do you know that you can hop on a bicycle today on the Georgetown campus, ride down the hill under Canal Road and then follow the same historic trail 300 miles all the way to Pittsburgh?

History is a fabric that weaves together elements of time and place. This 5-week course will explore local connections between the neighborhood of Georgetown and Washington, DC / Maryland as well as regional connections between the Chesapeake and Ohio River watersheds as they have evolved over the last 200 years. Each student will be required to complete a research paper and class presentation in the final week addressing 1 of 4 weekly themes: environmental sustainability, westward expansion, changing border lines and modern echoes. Students will combine research into targeted topics with in-person experiential learning through hiking and biking along the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal, the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Rail / Crescent Trail and the DC Trolley Trail. All three historic transportation corridors intersect in the vicinity of Georgetown's Car Barn. Together, they trace Georgetown's evolution from a small port town to an integral link in the nation's westward expansion across the Eastern Continental Divide. They also trace a history of connection and conflict, from Maryland's experience as a border state during the Civil War to the interplay among diverse communities in the Washington, DC region that has continued to the present day as each community struggles to define itself and expand or limit its connections with neighboring communities.

Students will begin by studying the Chesapeake watershed and colonists' vision for using the Potomac River to serve as a pathway to the Ohio River and routes along the Mississippi long used by Native Americans and French traders. Navigation up the Potomac was blocked by Great Falls, leading to efforts throughout the 19th Century to build a canal that would enable connections via Georgetown from Alexandria, VA all the way to Pittsburgh, PA. Such a dream would have required building canal locks rising 1,700 feet to cross the Appalachian mountain range, a feat never accomplished anywhere in the history of canals.

The same day in 1828 that the C&O broke ground marked the start of construction for the B&O Railway, creating constant competition between these two ventures over limited rights-of-way and public funding. By the time the C&O canal reached Cumberland, MD, the B&O was already in operation, connecting Western Maryland not to DC, but rather to Baltimore. B&O later acquired the C&O rights-of-way to block any competing rail line and extended its own rail

link to Georgetown along the path of what is now the Crescent Trail. Rivalry between Washington and Baltimore reflected competition with another pathway west along the National Road: built originally to carry carriages in the 19th century, it lost out to the railroad but later regained importance with the invention of the automobile.

Arguments over optimal transportation modes continue today, both nationally and locally along these same trails. Bumper-to-bumper traffic on M Street NW has rekindled calls in DC for new options, including a gondola that could connect the Car Barn to the Rosslyn Metro, since Georgetown famously has no Metro station. Today, the Crescent Trail runs from Washington Harbor to Bethesda, where city leaders struggle with how to accommodate two forms of transportation - light rail and bicycles - along the same narrow right-of-way.

Walking along the Crescent Trail after any heavy rain, one can immediately smell the after effects of Combined Sewer Outflows (CSOs) that dump sewage directly into the Potomac River. In May, 2024, DC Water began construction on the Potomac [River Tunnel Project](#) to divert sewage away from these CSOs. Along with the floodgates to protect Washington Harbor, CSOs serve as powerful reminders that Georgetown and the Potomac River both help and harm on another. The same Potomac River that provides drinking water and transportation to the west also brings devastating floods that ultimately closed the C&O Canal as a commercial venture.

Learning Objectives

- Students will explore how the Georgetown community came into existence and how these trails connect Georgetown with other communities in Washington, DC as well as how urban centers on the Atlantic coast connect with interior rural regions.
- Students will analyze the technology and economics of transportation options via water, rail and road and consider which options make the most sense for what purposes and for whose interests.
- Students will consider environmental impacts and how communities have developed in harmony with and opposition to forces of nature.
- Students will explore the rich history found along these transportation corridors and consider how long-ago historic conflicts still echo today.
- Students will learn to analyze primary and secondary historical sources including their context.
- Students will collect and analyze historic data to identify patterns and draw conclusions.

Required Resources

It is anticipated that many of weekly readings will be made available within Canvas or via links to sources in the Georgetown University Library.

Hiking and riding elements of the course will allow students to experience for themselves and reflect upon the physical challenges and opportunities for multiple pathways and connections that have been developed and/or discarded throughout the history of the Georgetown community.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to complete the following requirements:

- 1. Discussion Postings and Class Participation (40%):** Class participation provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your understanding of the theories, concepts, and practices described in the assigned readings. More importantly, it allows you to further develop your persuasive communication skills. Success in this course depends on the preparedness and active engagement of all students. **The readings and assignments listed on this syllabus should be completed prior to each class. Prior to each class, students will submit an online discussion posting in Canvas to set up the in-class discussions.**
- 2. Historiographical Essay (60%):** Each student will complete a historiographical essay based one of the four weekly themes of the course. All topics must be approved by the professor by the end of the first week. Research for the essay must include at least five sources including at least two primary sources. Students will present their papers to their classmates on the last day of class.

The breakdown for grading of the essay will be as follows:

Sources:	10%	due on June 10
Draft:	15%	due on June 19
Final Paper:	25%	due on June 30
Presentation:	10%	due on July 3
Total	60%	

3. Citations

Proper citations are extremely important for historical writing. All students must follow the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) when citing their sources.

Class Schedule

Week One: June 2 to June 5

Theme: Water, Topography, Geography and Economics

Why was Georgetown founded at its location on the Potomac River? How has its relationship with the river evolved over the course of its history? What logistical factors have driven the growth or decline of its economy? What are the impacts of too much water (floods) and not enough (silting)? How can one analyze the relative costs and benefits of different modes of transportation and infrastructure?

Readings: Students will research primary and secondary sources including maps, company reports and meeting minutes. Students will be introduced to basic economic principles to compare and analyze the up-front capital costs and on-going operating costs for canal, rail and road transportation. We will also cover basic concepts of storm water management.

Readings will include selections from:

Fletcher, Robert S.G. and Reichardt, Alec Zuercher. *Inlands: Empires, Contested Interiors and the Connection of the World*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2025, p. 29-61.

DC Water Clean Rivers Project Biannual Report on the [Potomac River Tunnel](#) Project, Spring 2024

Monday: Course Introduction / Interlocking Themes / History and Numbers, Grand Ideas of ventures, basic physics and micro economics.

Tuesday: Overview of 3 trails; History of Car Barn, Project Management, logistics, land ownership.

Wednesday: Use of Primary Sources; Selection of Research Topics. Visit to Booth Collections or Georgetown Public Library.

Thursday: Hiking Experience (readings on Native Americans and pre-colonial connections along Potomac River).

Experience: Hike from the top of the Car Barn, down the Exorcist Steps, under the C&O Canal and along the Crescent Trail, under the remnants of the Aqueduct Bridge over the Potomac to Washington Harbor and Mile 0 of the C&O Canal. Return along the C&O past the docked canal boat under repair at Thomas Jefferson St. *Round trip distance 3 miles.*

Week Two: June 9 to June 12

Theme: **Westward Expansion and Competition**

The C&O Canal, B&O Railroad and National Road were all manifestations of long-standing efforts by British colonists to connect the Ohio River with eastern seaports rather than rival ports on the Mississippi. These efforts led to national and global conflicts, starting in the 1700s when a skirmish between Lt. George Washington and French forces near the site of modern Pittsburgh sparked the French and Indian War. Native Americans were active participants on both sides of this conflict. What were the goals of each of these groups? How did they (mis)understand one another and the lands they were fighting over?

Monday: George Washington's west / Potowmack Canal around Great Falls

Tuesday: Comparison of C&O and Erie Canal, National Road

Wednesday: C&O and B&O competition

Thursday: – Biking Experience

Readings: Students will read secondary sources and research primary sources including census records, letters and [George Washington's surrender note at Fort Necessity](#).

Readings will include selections from:

Blackhawk, Ned. *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of US History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023.

Anderson, Fred. *Crucible of War, The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000., p. 1-66.

Stover, John F. *History of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1987.

Ferrara, Mark S. *The Raging Erie: Life and Labor Along the Erie Canal*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2024.

Metcalf, Paul. *Waters of Potowmack*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1982. Part Two, Transportation, p. 103-127.

Experience: Bicycle Ride from Georgetown along the C&O towpath from Georgetown University to Great Falls. Round trip distance 24 miles. Students may ride their own bikes or purchase a day pass from Capital Bikeshare (\$8 per day plus \$6 in time charges).

Week Three: June 16 to June 19

Theme: **Connections and Conflicts**

This week, students will study the Whiskey Rebellion to explore tensions between Eastern urban and Western rural regions. We will explore political, economic and legal conflicts over who has right to own and/or benefit from the use of properties.

Monday: The Whiskey Rebellion; urban centers v. rural interior

Tuesday: Evolution of Political Borders in Virginia, Maryland and DC

Wednesday: Rights of Way conflicts from Point of Rocks to the Purple Line

Thursday: Experience

Readings: Hogeland, William. *The Whiskey Rebellion: George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and the Frontier Rebels Who Challenged America's Newfound Sovereignty*. New York: Scribner, 2006.

Experience: Bicycle ride from Georgetown along the Crescent Trail to Bethesda Purple Line. *Round trip distance: 15 miles.*

Week Four: June 23 to June 26

Theme: **Defining Communities**

This week students will explore the demographic history of Georgetown and investigate issues of historic preservation, racial integration and relations between DC and suburban communities.

Readings: Census reports. Newspaper articles on development of Georgetown and surrounding communities including civil rights protests at Glen Echo Park. The Old Georgetown Act; Historic Preservation efforts to save and/or redevelop the C&O Canal.

Babb, Valerie and Gibbs, Carroll R. *Black Georgetown Remembered: A History of its Black Community from the Founding of "The Town of George" in 1751 to the Present Day*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2022.

Monday: Georgetown's changing demographics across its history

Tuesday: Georgetown connections with or without Metro

Wednesday: **VISIT FROM JOE STERNLIEB** director of Georgetown BID.

Thursday: Experience

Experience: Hike from Yates Field House past the site of the 1896 Trolley Bridge and along the Trolley right of way towards Palisades to Clark Place, site of one of four bridges no longer in operation. *Approximate distance 3 miles.*

Week Five: June 30 to July 3

Theme: Modern Echoes

How are the challenges and conflicts studied from the past reflected in current events today? We will look at debates over DC Statehood, Maryland redistricting and the question of whether/how to better link Georgetown with the Metro rail system including the potential for a gondola connection at the Car Barn.

Monday: (Re)newed Connections via a Gondola and/or Trolley Bridge.

Tuesday: Preservation v. new construction; C&O Canal as recreation/economic asset.

Wednesday: [History of Flooding](#) and current DC Water stormwater management.

Thursday: Student Presentations

Readings: TBD

Experience: Students will present their final papers to their classmates on the last day of class.

[Optional Excursions]:

Students may wish to take additional trips along the C&O on their own, either to support research for their course paper or simply to enjoy the Trail. The C&O intersects Amtrak stations at Harper's Ferry, Cumberland, Connellsville and Pittsburgh, allowing for multiple access points for students with or without driving a car.

Here are some suggested trips:

- (1) Car or train to Harper's Ferry. Ride north along the C&O Trail to Antietam and back. *Estimated distance 20 miles.*
- (2) Car to Little Orleans, MD. Ride or hike along the C&O Trail through the 3,800 ft [Paw Paw Tunnel](#), as the canal crosses under a mountain. *Estimated distance 25 miles.*
- (3) Car or train to Cumberland, MD. Ride from the end of the C&O along the Great Allegheny Passage [GAP Trail](#) up 1,700 feet, across the Mason Dixon Line and the Eastern Continental Divide to Meyersdale, PA. Stay overnight in Meyersdale and return downhill to Cumberland. *Estimated distance 64 miles.*

Grading

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C, D and F. Please reference the grading rubric below:

A	94-100%
A-	90-93.99%
B+	87-89.99%
B	83-86.99%
B-	80-82.99%
C	70-79.99%
D	60-69.99%
F	59.99% and below

Letter Grading Descriptions:

Listed below are grades and academic standards for each grade awarded.

A = 94-100%

Clearly stands out as excellent work that could be used as a model for other students to emulate. Shows excellent grasp of the course subject matter and conceptual integration of a range of different and complex concepts. Shows excellent in-depth analytical thinking and an innovative application of course concepts. Is extremely well written and organized. Often provides valuable relevant perspectives from outside sources and/or personal experience.

A- = 90-93.99%

Represents high quality work that shows a very good grasp of the course subject matter and conceptual integration. While not as high quality as work receiving an “A” grade, shows a high level of thinking, analysis, and application. Is very well written and organized, with few problems of sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. Occasionally provides relevant perspectives from outside sources and/or personal experience.

B+ = 87-89.99%

Represents good work that shows a solid grasp of the subject matter and effective application. While not as high quality as work receiving an “A-” grade, generally shows good thinking and analysis. Is generally well written and organized but may have limited problems of sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and/or organization. Provides limited relevant perspectives from outside sources or personal experience.

B = 83-86.99 %

Represents satisfactory work with an adequate level of thinking and analysis. Standard of presentation, organization and appropriateness of application is adequate but is lacking compared to B+ or A- level work. Few external perspectives are provided.

B- = 80-82.99 %

Work is below expectations. Presentation is often general, superficial, or incomplete and not very well written. Indicates minimal level of individual thought or effort with a lack of understanding of key course concepts. Reflects inadequate application of the concepts to perspectives from outside sources and/or personal experience.

C = 70-79.99%

Work is barely satisfactory. It is poorly written and presented, shows poor analysis, misses important substantive elements, and lacks application of outside sources and/or personal experience.

D = 60-69.99%

Work is clearly unsatisfactory.

F = 59.99% and below

Fails to meet minimum acceptable standards.

Course Policies

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all sessions of this course. In a case where a student expects to miss a class, the instructor must be notified prior to the session. Absences may affect the student's grade.

Late Assignments

Late submissions will be subject to a grade reduction of at least 5%. In case of an emergency, this rule can be waived with appropriate documentation and cause. No assignments or coursework can be accepted after the course has ended.

University Policies

Incompletes

Students are expected to complete all coursework by the end of the semester in which that course is taken. Incompletes are granted in only the most extraordinary circumstances and with appropriate documentation. Should a situation arise in which a student feels that additional time may be required to complete the coursework, the instructor must be contacted by the student. All incompletes must also receive program approval prior to the last day of the course.

Course Policies Addendum

Please use the link above to review University policies on Citations, TurnItIn, Instructional Continuity, Honor System, Accommodation Policy for Students with Disabilities, Academic Support, Technical Support, Sexual Misconduct and Pregnancy Adjustments / Accommodations

Age Requirement and ADA Compliance

Registration in this course is restricted to students who are at least 18 years of age. Alternative arrangements will be made for any student who is physically unable to take part in the proposed experiential portions of the course in accordance with Georgetown University policies.